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1867

Who Wrote

ROCK ME TO SLEEP ?

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A

VINDICATION

OF THE

CLAIM OF ALEXANDER M. W. BALL,

OF ELIZABETH, N. J.,

TO

THE AUTHORSHIP OF THE POEM,

Rock me to Sleep, Mother.

By O. A. MORSE,

Of Cherry Valley, N. Y.

WITH AN INTRODUCTORY NOTE FROM
LUTHER R. MARSH.

NEW YORK:
M. W. DODD, 506 BROADWAY.
1867.

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

NEW YORK, *February 15, 1867.*

My dear Sir :

I do not yet see, in print, the article which you permitted me to read in manuscript, vindicating the claim of our friend Mr. Ball, to the authorship of the poem, which has found lodgment in the public favor, "Rock me to sleep." I hope the friendship which caused you to write it will not cool, ere you consummate the defense by giving it to type. So many emulous pens claim the lines, and one especially asserts with such earnestness, and help of publishers, its right to appropriate them, that the real author is in danger of losing his offspring; and, soon, nothing short of a writ of *habeas corpus* and judgment thereon, will restore to the father the

custody of his own child. Indeed already, he stands in an equivocal position in the estimation of those who are unacquainted with him, and who are less familiar with the facts than we are. Through the zeal of his friends, his claim to the poem has acquired such publicity, that he is now driven to the alternative of defending his right, or hereafter remaining clouded with the suspicion of having put forth unfounded pretensions. A man's duty to himself and family sometimes calls on him to wage a contest he would else shrink from and abandon. These considerations, in a great measure, have been overcome in him, by a chivalric forbearance towards his chief contestant, and she would have walked, mistress, over the field, had not you, whose leisure permitted, whose tendencies are in the way of such an investigation, and whose character gives voucher for every statement of fact, undertaken of your own accord, unsolicited by him, the arranging of some of the prominent proofs in his behalf.

As I remember your article, there were

some classes of evidence which you did not deem it necessary to invoke, such as the domestic testimonies — the absolute declarations of wife and children as to dates and facts — and other cumulative proof; but enough was presented, I thought, to settle the question of authorship, and to illustrate a very curious phenomenon in literature.

Cordially Yours,

LUTHER R. MARSH.

Hon. OLIVER A. MORSE,

Cherry Valley.

VINDICATION.

Many lovers of lyric poetry, for a few years past, have been delighted with a poem, which is really a fragment of a poem, whose burden is “Rock me to sleep, mother.” This fragment has been floating in the newspapers under the *nom de plume* of Florence Percy, and likewise has been published as a song set to music. The power and tenderness of feeling evinced in it, the harmoniousness and elegance of its versification, and the deep sweet flow of its sentiment render it popular and admired by all classes of readers. The whole poem may be ranked among the gems of American literature, nor is it perhaps too much to say, that as a plaintive refrain of filial love, it is not surpassed in our language. The lines of Cowper to his mother’s picture awaken the same emotions, but in a less degree than these exquisite

verses, and certainly are inferior to them, as a longing and a cry that cannot be suppressed, for converse with the spirit of a beloved departed mother. It may be a question, whether in Cowper's day, the spiritual atmosphere of England was not such, as to render impossible, even to the most refined and acute souls, any such vivid recognition and perception of beloved beings in the other world, as are manifested in these lines.

A controversy has arisen respecting the authorship of this production, which promises to make a curious item in literary history. The six verses of the poem which have been in the newspapers and set to music, are claimed by various persons, and on the 13th of June 1865, a note, of which the following is a copy, was published in the *New York Evening Post*:

LITERARY MISAPPROPRIATION.

To the Editor of the *Evening Post*.

Please allow me sufficient space in your columns for a few words concerning a little poem entitled, "Rock me to sleep," which unwisely enough, as it has proved, I wrote and published five years ago, the authorship of which, by some queer freak of taste, has been repeatedly claimed

by eight or ten persons, not one of whom ever saw the poem until it appeared in print.

I am certainly one of the last individuals in the world to take the humiliating position of contending in public or otherwise, for a matter of literary credit; and so long as this question was merely that of ability to write the poem in dispute it was simply amusing to me.

But when it assumes, as it has latterly done, the attitude of a slander, liable to set me wrong in the opinion of many whose regard is dearer to me than any newspaper praise could be. When I hear myself good naturedly designated in society, as the lady who pretends to have written, etc., it is high time to state the facts.

I certainly wrote the song in question, and sent it from Italy in May, 1860, to the *Philadelphia Saturday Evening Post*, in which it immediately appeared, with the signature of "Florence Percy," a name which I mistakenly adopted when a school girl.

I remember laughing heartily at an enthusiastic friend of mine, who, reading for the hundredth time, as only he could read, Bulwer's sweet little lyric commencing

"When stars are in the quiet skies,
"Then most I pine for thee :
"Bend on me then thy tender eyes,
"As stars look on the sea "

remarked gravely, "I wish I had written that song;" and he continued, holding the book at arm's length, and looking at the print with loving eyes, "I believe I should have done it if Bulwer had let it alone."

Accepting this as a probability, I can but regret that I wrote the unhappy poem, herein designated, believing

as I must believe that every one of its claimants would have written it in due time, and doubtless more perfectly if "I had let it alone."

Very respectfully,

ELIZABETH A. C. AKERS.

WASHINGTON CITY, D. C., *June*, 1865.

In a volume of poems published for Mrs. Akers by Messrs. Ticknor and Fields, in 1866, these six verses are included. Consequent on the publication of this card, and this volume, remarks and insinuations have been made, both in public prints and in private circles, respecting the author of the whole poem of such a character, as to demand some response from him or his friends. The writer of these pages is one of those friends, and while he does not profess any special qualification for his volunteered championship, he does profess to be actuated by an honest intention that the truth shall be made plain. The whole poem, of fifteen verses, of eight lines each, was written by Alexander M. W. Ball, of Elizabeth, New Jersey, in the latter part of the year 1856, and the early part of the year 1857. It is as follows, and as a whole has never before been in print.

ROCK ME TO SLEEP, MOTHER.

L.

Backward, flow backward, oh full tide of years,
I am so weary of toils and of tears—
Toil without recompense — tears all in vain,
Take them, and give me my childhood again.
I have grown weary of dust and decay—
Weary of flinging my heart's wealth away :
Weary of sowing for others to reap,
Rock me to sleep, mother, rock me to sleep.

II.

Hushed be my sighing, I see through the mist
Loved ones that cheer me, and silently list :
Hark ! tis the hymning of angelic song,
Joyfully leading my sad heart along,

Treading the grass that now weeps on your grave,
Let me in spirit your sweet presence crave:
This will now cheer me, no more will I weep,
Rock me to sleep, mother, rock me to sleep.

III.

Clouded and sabled, there come with my age
Records of sadness, to soil the fair page.
Footprints of sorrow to blot it all o'er,
Thinking of those on the echoless shore.
Only, I see you look down on me now,
While humbly kneeling, at his cross I bow:
Come then and dry up the tears I must weep,
Rock me to sleep, mother, rock me to sleep.

IV.

As stars in the day are concealed by the light,
And darkness unveils them alone to the sight,
So sleeping I see you, unseen when awake,
And welcome thrice welcome is sleep for your sake.

Soft are my slumbers, a glory of beams,
Announcing your coming, illumines my dreams :
Visit me nightly, and when I would weep,
Rock me to sleep, mother, rock me to sleep.

V.

Backward, turn backward, then time in your flight,
Make me a child again just for to-night,
Mother, come back from the echoless shore,
Take me again to your heart as of yore,
Kiss from my forehead the furrows of care,
Smooth the few silver threads out of my hair ;
Over my slumbers your loving watch keep,
Rock me to sleep, mother, rock me to sleep.

VI.

Over my heart in bright days that are flown,
No love like mother love ever has shone,
No other worship abides and endures,
Faithful, unselfish, and patient like yours ;

None like a mother can charm away pain
From the sick soul and the world weary brain,
Slumber's soft calms o'er my heavy lids creep,
Rock me to sleep, mother, rock me to sleep.

VII.

Tired of the hollow, the base, the untrue,
Mother, dear mother, my heart calls for you,
Many a summer the grass has grown green,
Blossomed and faded our faces between.
Yet with strong yearning and passionate pain,
Long I to-night for your presence again;
Come from the silence, so long and so deep,
Rock me to sleep, mother, rock me to sleep.

VIII.

Mother, dear mother, the days have been long,
Since I last hushed to your lullaby song;
Sing it, and unto my soul it shall seem,
Manhood's long years have been only a dream.

Clasped to your heart, in a loving embrace,
 With your light lashes just sweeping my face :
 Never hereafter to sigh or to weep,
 Rock me to sleep, mother, rock me to sleep.

IX.

Come, let your brown hair, just lighted with gold
 Fall on your shoulders again as of old —
 Let it fall over my forehead to-night,
 Shading my faint eyes away from the light :
 For with its sunny-edged shadows once more
 Fondly will throng the sweet visions of yore,
 Lovingly, softly, its charmed billows sweep —
 Rock me to sleep, mother, rock me to sleep.

X.

Angelic mother, now tenderly smile,
 While the fond seraphs my soul shall beguile ;
 Shed o'er my pathway the spirit world's light
 To guide and to cheer me, all through the night.

I have grown weary of life's changing tide,
 Weary of weeping for hopes that have died ;
 Weary of climbing life's hill side so steep—
 Rock me to sleep, mother, rock me to sleep.

XI.

Tired of earth's mockery, and the world's strife,
 Tired of the penances paid for this life—
 Growing more weary of heartless display—
 Weary of world's night, I long for the day—
 Let then your spirit encompass me now,
 While on your bosom in silence I bow,
 Tenderly watching my thoughts as they sweep,
 Rock me to sleep, mother, rock me to sleep.

XII.

Thought cannot linger around the cold tomb,
 Sweet spirit faees will break through its gloom,
 And when I wipe the fresh tear drops away,
 Clouds turn to brightness, and roseate day

Breaks on my vision, then smiling again
Peace spreads her gentle wings softly to reign,
Voices celestial forbid me to weep,
Rock me to sleep, mother, rock me to sleep.

XIII.

Stilled are my tumults, I see in the sky
Loved ones whose splendors have drowned every sigh,
Faces familiar of friends here no more,
Fairer and fonder than ever before —
Glorified figures that stoop to caress,
Mighty to comfort, and mighty to bless —
Bright is the vision — no more can I weep,
Rock me to sleep, mother, rock me to sleep.

XIV.

Rock me to sleep, mother, rock me to rest;
Calm'd with your smiling the storm in my breast,
Stilled are the sorrows you come to allay ;
Teach me again as of old how to pray —

Contentions without, contentions within,
Battlings with doubt, and temptation, and sin,
Ceased with your presence, I cannot now weep,
Rock me to sleep, mother, rock me to sleep.

XV.

Thus with my loved ones I'll watch by your side,
Nor weep once again, whatever betide,
Waiting all calmly the coming of those
Holding the signet of death's cold repose;—
Farewell to sorrow—farewell to all ill—
Whispers are stealing, sad heart be now still,—
With my dear mother, kind watch I will keep,
She charges the angels to rock me to sleep.

The following verses are found in Mrs. Akers's volume :

ROCK ME TO SLEEP.

Backward, turn backward, O time in your flight,
Make me a child again just for to-night !
Mother, come back from the echoless shore,
Take me again to your heart as of yore ;
Kiss from my forehead the furrows of care,
Smooth the few silver threads out of my hair ;
Over my slumbers your loving watch keep ;
Rock me to sleep, mother, rock me to sleep !

Backward, flow backward, O tide of the years !
I am so weary of toil and of tears,
Toil without recompense, tears all in vain,
Take them, and give me my childhood again ;
I have grown weary of dust and decay,
Weary of flinging my soul-wealth away ;
Weary of sowing for others to reap ;
Rock me to sleep, mother, rock me to sleep !

Tired of the hollow, the base, the untrue,
Mother, O mother, my heart calls for you !
Many a summer the grass has grown green,
Blossomed and faded, our faces between :
Yet, with strong yearning and passionate pain,
Long I to-night for your presence again.
Come from the silence so long and so deep ;
Rock me to sleep, mother, rock me to sleep !

Over my heart, in the days that are flown,
No love like mother-love ever has shone;
No other worship abides and endures,
Faithful, unselfish, and patient like yours:
None like a mother can charm away pain
From the sick soul and the world weary brain,
Slumber's soft calms o'er my heavy lids creep,
Rock me to sleep, mother, rock me to sleep!

Come let your brown hair just lighted with gold,
Fall on your shoulders again as of old;
Let it drop over my forehead to-night,
Shading my faint eyes away from the light;
For with its sunny-edged shadows once more
Haply will throng the sweet visions of yore:
Lovingly, softly, its bright billows sweep;
Rock me to sleep, mother, rock me to sleep!

Mother, dear mother, the years have been long
Since I last listened your lullaby song;
Sing, then, and unto my soul it shall seem
Womanhood's years have been only a dream.
Clasped to your heart in a loving embrace,
With your light lashes just sweeping my face,
Never hereafter to wake or to weep:
Rock me to sleep, mother, rock me to sleep!

Mrs. Akers is an authoress favorably known to the public, whose writings have the *imprimatur* of the press of Ticknor and Fields. Mr. Ball is a gentleman in private life, who has never published a line, and is unknown as a poet, except to his intimate friends. In the issue which is here

made between them, the lady therefore has the advantage in the fact, that before the public the presumption would be in her favor. Her publishers intimate that they rest her case on that ground; but whether they shall continue to do so will be a matter of more moment to her than to Mr. Ball. The controversy has been forced on Mr. Ball, or rather on his friends, for he has not even yet been willing to take much part in it. Several persons, who long have been familiar with the whole poem, as written by him, when they saw the authorship claimed by and accorded to another, on their own responsibility and without his knowledge, asserted in the newspapers that he was the veritable author. Although he was not known as a poet, his personal and social standing gave circulation, and more or less credit to this statement, and to his regret and chagrin he has found himself the subject of remark in the newspapers, sometimes of a most unpleasant character.* He would have been willing that

*For instance in these two extracts, the first seems to give the name at which the slur towards the close of the latter is pointed.

From the N. Y. Evening Gazette, Dec 31, 1866.

The contest over the authorship of that singularly popular poem entitled "Rock me to sleep, mother" is still vigorously prosecuted by Mr. A. M.

Mrs. Akers or any one else, should have enjoyed all the credit that could be had from the poem ; but his friends feel, as Mrs. Akers's note expresses it, that when the matter assumes the attitude of a slander, it is high time the facts should be made known.

The question has been asked, who is Mr. Ball whose friends declare to be the author of one of the most beautiful poems of the day ? If he has written this, it is said, he could write other things like it, and what else has he written ? These

W. Ball, of Elizabeth. Dr. Ripley, literary editor of the *Tribune*, and Dr. Coles, of Newark, author of *Microcosm*, who have interested themselves in the matter, both admit the justice of Mr. Ball's claims.

From the N. Y. Evening Gazette, Jan 3, 1867.

LITERARY LARCENIES.

There must be something in a literary reputation, or so many would not be striving to attain it by all sorts of means. There is a class of scribblers who wriggle themselves into momentary notoriety by puffery, and there is another class who impudently demand attention by claiming the authorship of productions which they could not under any circumstances have written. They generally fasten upon some striking poem which was published anonymously, or whose writer's name has been separated from it in its wanderings over land and sea, and make a manuscript copy, which they read to their friends, who, of course, are ready afterwards to testify that they saw the piece in manuscript, fresh from the brain of the author, before it found its way in print, with other little fanciful additions which they very honestly believe. Some of the most famous lyrics in the language have had their paternity disputed in this way. Among others, Wolfe's *Burial of Sir John Moore*, which a number of imaginative Celts endeavored to father upon themselves, and Campbell's *Exile of Erin*, which it is now pretended that he stole bodily, we believe from the traditionary exile himself, McCann, if that was his name. They are very active here, and at this time —these barefaced purloiners of reputation —snapping up any little waif that may come under their observation. Every-

would seem reasonable queries, and they shall be fully answered.

The natural division of the inquiry would be, first, could Mr. Ball have written the poem, that is, has he the ability to write it; and second, did he write it, and if so, when did he write it. Both of these points will be fully considered and illustrated, but in the inverse order in which they are stated.

In her note to the *Evening Post*, Mrs. Akers

body remembers the young person of the softer sex, a Miss Peck, if we recall her name correctly, who said that 'twas she, and not Mr. William Allan Butler, who wrote *Nothing to Wear* which, of course, she had no means of proving beyond her mere assertion, which nobody was gallant enough to accept. A second instance of disputed authorship was ventilated a few months since in the *Round Table*, the thing in dispute then being a copy of verses entitled *The Long Ago*, and written by a Mr. Benjamin F. Taylor, of Chicago, who has had all sorts of hands grasping after his imaginary laurel, and rousing, through their friends, a mighty clamor for justice, which they richly deserved in the nearest literary pillory.

A third instance concerned the plaintive little lyric *Rock me to sleep, mother*, which was written by Florence Percy, otherwise Mrs. Akers, formerly the widow of a sculptor of that name and now we believe a Mrs. Perry of somewhere in Virginia. We say that it was written by her since she has included it in the blue and gold edition of her poems which was published not long ago in Boston. This fact proves nothing to those who dispute her claims in behalf of themselves or others, but it settles the question as regards the general reader who has no interest in it beyond what he derives from the poetry. If an author of reputation says that he or she wrote such or such a poem, his or her word ought to end all controversy, particularly such controversies as are waged by persons of whom no one ever heard before or cares to hear again. It is time, it is more than time, that these cases of literary larceny were punished, for if allowed to flourish much longer unchecked no man can feel that his poem or his purse is safe. For he who begins by putting his name to a poem that he did not write may end by putting the name of another to one that he did, and find himself some fine morning in prison for forgery.

has made the exact issue between herself and all other claimants. Writing in June, 1865, she says she wrote and published the poem five years ago, and that not one of its claimants ever saw it till it appeared in print. So far then as she is concerned, the question will be settled, if the existence of the poem prior to 1860, can be established.

Mr. Ball wrote, or made the draft of the whole poem, except one verse, in the latter part of the year 1856. In February, 1857, he sailed for California, and on the steamers, on both oceans, he corrected and polished it, and added one verse. The following letters and facts are given as evidence of the truth of this statement.

The letters bear internal evidence of their authenticity, and will commend themselves to any intelligent reader as genuine and truthful. Some of the writers are ladies, and their names are not printed, as it is not anticipated that either the genuineness of the letters, or the good faith or intelligence of the writers will be questioned. But the names can be given, and the letters more fully authenticated, should there be any question about either.

POSTSCRIPT OF A LETTER TO MR. BALL, DATED

BROOKLYN, APRIL 7, 1858.

P. S.— Will you please send me by the doctor, the lines on the fly leaf of the book which I presented to you, and also the other poem, which you read to me when I saw you last, entitled, “Rock me to sleep, mother.”

NEW YORK, July 10, 1866.

My Dear Mr. Ball:

In reply to your inquiry whether I remembered a certain visit to your house in Newark and the reading by you of “Rock me to sleep, mother,” I have to say that my recollection is most vivid of the whole affair. A projected visit by myself and Mrs. —— was carried into execution. Upon our arriving we found that Mrs. Ball had gone to Leroy to place her daughter at school, but at your urgent request we remained till her return.

It was before her return that one evening you read the disputed poem, and so distinct is my recollection of the circumstances, that the room and the positions occupied by all of us, are before me. It was a manuscript written upon note paper. That the authorship had been questioned I did not know until a paragraph in the *Evening Post* in this city announced that you were at last believed to be the rightful claimant.

I involuntarily remarked that I could have settled that long ago, for I had so many years since heard it from your own manuscript. That you should have been ques-

tioned in the matter is only additional proof of your too great modesty, which has thus far prevented many beautiful things you have written being published and thus establishing at once the authorship of what your many friends may justly be proud.

I am yours, truly,
I. E. S.

ITHACA, June 27, 1865.

My dear Mr. Ball:

* * * * *

What I particularly intended to say when I commenced this sheet was, that I saw recently in the *N. Y. Evening Post*, a card from Mrs. Akers, in which she claims to have written and published in 1860, the poem "Rock me to sleep, mother." Now in the winter of 1856 or 1857, you read to me one evening in your study, your poem of "Rock me to sleep, mother." One verse of which commencing "Backward, flow backward," was at the time the subject of my criticism. You can fix the exact time by ascertaining which winter it was, that Mrs. Ball took Maria to Dr. Cox's, and placed her in the school in Leroy.

Had you acceded to the reiterated wishes of those of your friends whom you honored with the reading of some of your poetical effusions, to publish them, or at least give us copies of them, Mrs. Akers and some half score other ladies, would have been less bold in claiming the maternity of the poem in question. * * *

Very sincerely your friend,
L. P.

A bill now before the writer rendered by the Principal of the Leroy school, at the beginning of Mr. Ball's daughter's first term, fixes the date called for by the writers of the above letters in February, 1857.

In fact, the draft of the poem was read to these two ladies at that time, just prior to Mr. Ball's sailing for California.

ALBANY, October 26, 1866.

My dear Mr. Ball:

* * * * *

In reference to that beautiful poem, "Rock me to sleep, mother," I am sorry that I cannot remember the exact date when I first heard it. I distinctly remember your reading it to me, and I know it was either in the year 1857 or 1858. I have heard it sung, and highly praised, and was happy to say, that I had the pleasure of knowing the author. * * * * *

Your friend,
H. D. E.

8 PINE ST., NEW YORK, Oct. 25, 1866.

Dear Sir:

Relative to the controversy *in re* the authorship of "Rock me to sleep, mother."

Sometime during the autumn of 1859, I think in the month of September, I called on business at your house in Newark. Mrs. Ball was absent—in Cherry Valley, I believe—at the time.

In course of our conversation, you said you had been writing a satirical poem, which—as I knew some of the parties—you read to me; and during the interview you also took from your desk other productions, among them that which you have read to me to day, bearing the above title.

I am able to fix the date by that of the paper which was the subject of our interview, and which I now have before me.

Yours respectfully,

J. BURROWS HYDE.

To A. M. W. BALL, Esq.,

Elizabeth, N. J.

NEWARK, N. J., Jan. 11, 1867.

Dear Sir:

In reply to your inquiry as to my recollection of your reading to me “Rock me to sleep, mother” (and which you have just now reread to me), I would say, that during the summer of 1857, I called on you at your house to ascertain where you purchased a set of damask window curtains, as I wanted to procure the same kind. During my visit you read me that poem with others. I was particularly struck with this one, as I had known your mother, and remarked on the justness of the sentiment referring to her. I am confirmed in my recollection

of the *time*, by finding that the curtains I purchased on your recommendation were charged to me in September of that year, and it took some time to procure them. My wife, to whom I have spoken on the subject, recollects the occasion as I do. I remember saying to you at your house, when you read me the poetry referred to, that if you had not published you ought to do so, and that as we were old friends, if you did not publish, and would make me your literary executor, I would see that the gift God had given you should be known hereafter if I outlived you.

I am,

Yours truly,

LEWIS C. GROVER.

A. M. W. BALL, Esq.

Some of these letters were procured by Mr. Ball, and some voluntarily written to him, after the recent discussion concerning the authorship of the poem in the *Post*, *Tribune*, and other papers. A large amount of other proof of a like nature, could be given, and would be were there any question that the point, the existence of the poem prior to 1860, and as early as 1857, was not fully established. Do not these letters settle that with a certainty, to all intents, sufficient to convict of murder in any court in Christendom?

Evidence of Mr. Ball's authorship of an entirely different character, but equally conclusive, and perhaps more interesting, is now offered. This is found in the poem itself. It would seem that no criticism or argument could be needed to show that the same pen, the same inspiration which wrote the nine verses, which are now for the first time published, also wrote the other six. Mr. Ball's authorship as to the nine is not questioned, and do not the whole fifteen belong to the same one exquisite mosaic? Where else does this sweet verse belong, the first in the unpublished series, and does it not speak for him more convincingly than any dates and documents?

Hushed be my sighing, I see thro' the mist,
Loved ones that cheer me, and silently list,
Hark! 'tis the hymning of angelic song,
Joyfully leading my sad heart along.
Treading the grass that now weeps on your grave,
Let me in spirit your sweet presencee crave;
This will now cheer me, no more will I weep,
Rock me to sleep, mother, rock me to sleep.

Will it be said that this and its fellow unpublished verses, are merely interpolations in, and imitations of Mrs. Akers and Messrs. Ticknor and Field's original? Let us then scrutinize the next in order of these parts, and see whether it be indeed a counterfeit, or whether in every word and breath it is not full of truth and beauty, and does not belong, by an obviousness higher than any logic can prove, to this garland which a loving son has placed on the grave of his mother.

Clouded and sabled there come with my age,
Records of sadness to soil the fair page,
Footprints of sorrow to blot it all o'er,
Thinking of those on the echoless shore.

Only I see you look down on me now,
While humbly kneeling at his cross I bow;
Come then, and dry up the tears I must weep,
Rock me to sleep, mother, rock me to sleep.

Who that can at all appreciate the beauty of this poem, is not conscious and convinced as he thus reads it, part by part, that it all came to one soul by one inspiration. The same sweet, tender

minor strain of plaintiveness and pathos, is breathed in every line and verse, from the half passionate outburst of the “Backward, flow backward,” of the beginning, to the calm assured hopefulness of the end. To such a tribunal as from the nature of this case it must alone be presented before, it would seem that the most satisfactory guide to the truth will thus be found in the poem itself. Who that reads it all, as now first printed, can fail to recognize it as one entire thing? Mark how necessarily and with what effect, the renewed cry of “Backward, turn backward,” on the opening of the fifth verse, follows the pathetic rehearsal of the experiences of life in the preceding verses, and how the lament of a soul over its pains and penances, in the eleventh, unpublished, verse, harmonizes both in language and spirit with the seventh, published, verse. Read again the last verse, and see what a natural, simple, and harmonious finale it is to the whole:

Thus with my loved ones, I'll watch by your side,
Nor weep once again whatever betide,
Waiting all calmly the coming of those,
Holding the signet of death's cold repose:

Farewell to sorrow, farewell to all ill,
Whispers are stealing, sad heart be still ;
With my dear mother kind watch I will keep,
She charges the angels to rock me to sleep.

Whatever may be the relative merit of these separate parts, are they not all in one strain, of one style, with the same beauties and same defects, running everywhere, though in a greater or less measure. The repetitions may by some be considered a defect, but on the theory that the whole had been lost by the author, the finder, if disposed to appropriate it, would naturally publish only those verses which did not so plainly repeat themselves, selecting what might seem the best. The very fact then of this peculiarity, or defect, if it is one, must be taken as proof that the whole is the work of one mind. When the wise Hebrew king was called on to judge in a case not wholly unlike this, he distinguished the true parent from the spurious, by the readiness of the latter to see her pretended offspring cut in twain ; and will not the public, guided by like wisdom, with the whole poem, the full creation, the born child, before them, pronounce that the verses published by

Mrs. Akers, though beautiful in themselves, are *disiecta membra*, and that therefore she could not have been the mother.

The following statement suggested by the poem itself, will surely be deemed appropriate and interesting. In the disputed verses it is said :

“Come let your brown hair just lighted with gold,”

And again :

“Kiss from my forehead the furrows of care,
Smooth the few silver threads out of my hair.”

Though there is a large license granted to poets, particularly to professional poets, in such things, yet certainly the case of either party here will be helped, whose facts will accord with these expressions. This is a genuine poem, and came from the soul of the writer, whoever that writer was. It was not conceived, but felt. It did not arise from the brain, or fancy, but from the heart, or it would not find an answering chord in so many hearts. Can an instance be found of a poem of universal popularity, of this character, which did not spring from living reality, from the actual, not the ideal. Burns was a profes-

sional poet, but Highland Mary was a living maid. The mass of enduring poetry, of the plaintive cast, is a portraiture of the lives of the writers. Knowing what the instinctive judgment of most will be over the facts suggested by the above striking lines, the writer of this article states, that he has seen one of the ample tresses of the hair of his friend's mother, and that it is brown tinged with auburn, and that his friend's forehead is furrowed, and the silver threads in his hair not a few. As to the answering facts in the case of the fair claimant to a part of the lines, there is no evidence at hand, except so far as regards herself personally, but that surely must be considered satisfactory. Speaking as a widow, and it is understood that in the vicissitudes of her life, she has not long since been in that condition, she says (page 143 *Mrs. Akers's Poems*):

“Ah me! the red is yet upon my cheek,
And in my veins life’s vigorous currents play;
Adown my hair there shines no warning streak,
And the sweet meeting which you paint to-day
Seems sadly far away.

The next evidence properly belongs here, though it would be more fairly appreciated, if read with what hereafter appears on the general topic of Mr. Ball's poetry.

For many years past, he has been in the habit every year of writing for his family a Christmas carol, and of reading it likewise to some of his many friends and guests, who during the holidays partake of the hospitality of his house. These carols are hastily and carelessly written, for the partial and uncritical few to whom they are read. Like all his verses they are spontaneous and unstudied, and express in the most unreserved manner, the sentiments of tenderness and love for his family, which seem to have peculiar power over him at the Christmas festival. The bringing them before the public gaze, is only permitted by the consideration, that they may serve to protect for his family, his honorable name, which is now so strangely assailed. Sacred as they are, they must yield to this still more sacred end. The writer of these remarks, while a guest at Mr. Ball's house this last Christmas, on hearing read the carol written by him for that occasion, requested to see some of the others, and was startled to find in

them what he regarded as having a very important bearing on the question under consideration. This evidence, thus accidentally discovered, must impress any one in a way that mere dates and certificates never can. In reading it, who will not be led to exclaim, *magna est veritas!* It consists of extracts, given below, from the carols of 1852 to 1856 inclusive. But the reader is especially desired to take notice, that these extracts are not given as specimens of Mr. Ball's poetry. They are offered, without any regard whatever to their merit or demerit as poetry, simply to show the invariable and inevitable quickening and longing of his soul, at this season of the year, after his beloved mother. It was about this time in the year, December, that the draft of the poem was made, and these extracts show, that at every Christmas for years prior to the poem, his love for his mother found utterance through his poetical faculty, till at last, in the carol for 1856, it was poured forth in the very language of the poem itself. The reader is again requested to bear in mind the disclaimer, that these extracts are not offered as specimens of his poetry. They are now published, for the purpose just stated, unpolished and unpruned, as they were first written for the momentary pleasure of his own fireside.

CHRISTMAS 1852.

* * * *

Thro' the closed portals of the sky,
I see a ray descend,
That fills my heart with visions bright
Of *Mother*, brother, friend !
And shall we in this sacred place,
Meet round the Christmas tree
Nor seek the absent loved ones gone,
Nor *Mother* think of thee !

No, no, sweet scented is the air,
We breathe this Christmas day,
But sweeter, purer from the past,
Comes this thy hallowed ray ;
And memory brightens while we weep,
And feel that thou art near,
Part of our sunshine comes from thee,
Tho' now no longer here.

Thy memory rooted in our hearts,
 Can never be effaced,
 And with it now revive again,
 Joys not to be erased.
 Fond Mother! while you now commune,
 With him who followed you
 So quickly to the spirit world,
 Watch over us anew.

Time's reaper has not stopped to touch
 Only the full blown rose,
 But the sweet floweret felt his breath,
 And sank in death's repose.
 Dear Mother! you have now with you,
 Five of our little band,
 How soon we all must follow on,
 We dare not understand.

We feel thy happy spirit's breath,
 Upon our cheek at night,
 And waking, strain our opening eyes,
 To watch its morning flight.

* * * * *

CHRISTMAS 1853.

* * * * *

Then let us turn to days gone by,
Forgetting not another,
Whose face was brightest when we met,
It was our sainted mother.

She loved the day because it swelled
Her heart with pure emotion,
A household bound by silken ties,
And wrapped in love's devotion,
Made her more happy, and we caught
Our mother's gaze in gladness,
And from that fount of love there played,
A stream that drowned all sadness.

Fond Mother ! can you see us now ?
One only from the number,
That made your pleasant household up,
In yonder grave doth slumber ;

We mourn you both, and could we speak
Your spirits back to meet us,
'Twould be the happiest Christmas day
That ere on earth could greet us.

* * * * *

CHRISTMAS 1854.

* * * * *

First to the dead, we turn our humble lay,
To her that bore us would our spirits stray,
Dear Mother ! now remembering thee we meet,
At the old homestead, our good sire to greet,
Thy gentle face, still smiling on the wall,
Endears that homestead, shedding on us all,
A cheerful flush of many a blissful hour,
Ere death's alarm made us feel its power.
Sweet spirit land, where many loved ones wait,
To welcome those still here without thy gate ;
What joys exalt us when with raptured eye
Our thoughts exulting to thy regions fly,

For hovering spirits from thy mansions teach,
 A reuniting when yon sphere we reach ;
 Our wandering thoughts will penetrate thy mist,
 As to sweet tones of melody we list,—
 But oh ! how dark, how drear, how lone would seem
 The brightest world of which we fondly dream,
 If wandering lonely thro' its scenes we miss,
 The father, mother, brother, wife of this ?

* * * * *

CHRISTMAS 1855.

* * * * *

I hear a gentle murmur come spreading from the spheres,
 A hallowed mist surrounds me, a long loved form appears,
 All wreathed in joys and blessings, she takes her vacant
 place,
 And smiles upon the household, with her seraphic grace ;
 It is our sainted mother come,——

* * * * *

CHRISTMAS 1856.

* * * * *

And as time rolls us backward, we feel inclined to weep,
As the spirit of our mother comes, to rock our souls to
sleep.

* * * * *

It raised my thoughts to heaven, and in converse with
them there,
I felt a joy unearthly, and lighter sat world's care ;
For it opened up the vista of an echoless dim shore,
Where my mother kindly greets me, as in good days of
yore.

* * * * *

No comment can add to the force of this testimony. Mrs. Akers proclaims to the world that she wrote and published the lines in 1860, and that no one had read them till they appeared in

print; yet here we find some of the most striking and characteristic of those lines, almost verbatim, in a Christmas carol written by Mr. Ball in 1856. In addition to this hard fact, which cannot be gainsaid, these extracts answer a condition which might be required of the author of this poem, that, in his habitual thought, he should evince a marked tenderness over the memory of his mother. And who will not feel, as he sees written year after year, in these unstudied verses, such constant and unforgetting filial love, so remarkable in a middle aged man, that they were the product of a spirit which might be expected necessarily to blossom in this beautiful poem ?

The next piece of evidence might be claimed alone of itself to be conclusive on the whole question. It is a part of the original draft of the poem which fortunately has been found. It bears the marks of an unpracticed and unprofessional writer. It shows his groping and feeling after words and phrases, his stumblings, failures and successes, and instead of the draft, might rather be called the material out of which the draft was made. It needs no comment to show, that it is in truth, the ultimate outline, rude and

ragged of the beautiful poem. No one can look at it in the original, and not be profoundly impressed, that it is a genuine thing. Not a writer on earth, and in such a matter many writers would be infallible experts, on inspecting this document, would hesitate as to where the truth lies.

Here is presented a copy, so far as can be done in type, of that part of the draft which has been preserved.

tide
Backward flow backward oh flight of years

toils
I am so weary of sighs and of tears

tears
Sighs without recompense, Hopes all in vain,

give me my childhood
Take them and make me a loved child again

I have grown weary of dust and decay

Weary of flinging my hearts wealth away

sowing
Weary of planting for others to reap

Rock me to sleep mother rock me to sleep

heart
sighing
Hushed be my soul for I see through the clouds

bright spirit world
A world of the In the silence I list

Joyful sound
A Paeán of Joy comes floating along

Sceiling to hymnings of angelic song
And swells to an anthem of heavenly song

grass that weeps o'er your grave
Forgetting the grave that holds your remains

far above in your presence I lave
In the bright world above in your presence I lave

'twill
Henceforth this will calm me — I never will weep

I know now
For I know my dear mother will rock me to sleep

there seems on each page
Clouded and sabled I read on lifes page

sad
Of life this plain record that comes with age
Footprints of sadness will blot it all o'er

sorrow
When loved friends sail away from this lifes shore
Only we see them look down on us now

must weep
While we submissively in it bow come then and dry up the tears I
Rock me &c

fond halo
My minds eye is opened and visions of light

gently
Steal silently round me till all is so bright

her her
I see you distinctly your eye beaming joy
And beckons me onward her peace to enjoy

the glad
Sweet is the vision, I hear her sweet song

soul
In lullaby cheering my spirit along
To where the bright silver lined cloud always keep
The watch while my mother shall rock me to sleep

Backward turn backward old time in your flight

child
Make me a boy again — just for to night

Cease your
Mother come back to the echoless shore
Take me again to your heart as of yore
Help me to reach the echoless shore

forehead the furrows of eare
Kiss from my sad eyes the tears I have wept

the few silver threads out of my hair
Soothe me again as of yore when I slept

your
Over my slumber my loving watch keep
Rock me to sleep mother rock me to sleep

Over my heart
Kind watch you have kept in days that are flown
No love like my mothers ever has shone

No other loves worship abides and endures
Unselfish and patient and faithful like yours

None like a mother can chase away grief
pain
And cheer up the sorrowed in
From the sick soul and world weary brain
Slumbers soft calm — on my heavy lids creep
Rock me to sleep mother, rock me to sleep

Tired of the vain world the base the untrue
hollow

Oh mother my heart calls for you
Mother kind mother I now call to you
Many a summer the grass has grown green
Many a year your grave has grown green
Blossomed and faded our faces between
And blossomed with flowers
Yet with a yearning and deep seated pain
Yet with strong yearning and passionate pain
Long I to night for your presence again
Come from the silence so long and so deep
Rock me to sleep mother, rock me to sleep

brown lighted
Come let your hair just shadowed with gold
Fall on your shoulders again as of old
fall forehead
Let it drop over my vision to night
Shading my weak eyes away from the light

Mother dear mother the days have been long
years
hushed to your
Since I last heard your lullaby song
soul
Sing them again and unto my heart it shall seem
Manhoods long years have been but a dream

clasp to your
Clasping your arms in a loving embrace
Let your light lashes fall adown on my face
sweep
With your light lashes just sweeping my face
I will forget as I wake or I sleep
Never hereafter to wake or to weep
Rock

For with its golden edged shadows once more

the

Fondly will throng sweet visions of yore

Lovingly softly its charmed billows sweep

Rock me to sleep mother, rock me to sleep.

When the authorship of the poem was questioned, Mr. Ball looked for and found the draft. It was on two pieces of paper fastened by a wafer. In June last, the whole of the draft was shown to the following gentlemen, who called at Mr Ball's house, as a sort of committee to satisfy themselves on the question. George W. Carleton, the publisher in New York; Dr. A. N. Dougherty, of Newark; the Rev. J. F. Pingry, of Elizabeth, F. W. Foote, of Elizabeth; Dr. Lewis W. Oakley, Surgeon General; Dr. Westcott, J. R. Weeks, Silas Merchant, of Newark; Mr. Gilder, editor of the *Newark Daily Advertiser*; Mr. Potter, editor of the *Newark Commercial*, and Mr. Terhune, editor of the *Washington Literary Union*.

It was noticed by these gentlemen, that one of these pieces of paper on which this draft was written, and unfortunately the piece which has been lost, was a tradesman's bill rendered to Mr.

Ball in September, 1856. Of course this writing might have been made at any time on a bill of an older date, but where so many bills are presented and paid as in Mr. Ball's house, the presumption is that this one was thus used by him about the time of its presentation. At any rate, this little item is not without force in connection with the other evidence.

It is proper to remark here, that the gentlemen just named, in June last investigated this whole subject, from the original letters and papers referred to in this statement, and that they are ready to certify to the genuineness of these documents, and, as would follow, to their conviction of the rightfulness of Mr. Ball's claim.

It may seem superfluous to discuss the question, whether Mr. Ball could have written, that is, had the ability to write the poem, after the demonstration which has been made that he did write it. But in some of the newspapers, and doubtless in private circles where he is not known, the question has been asked, what else has he written worthy of this, that he should expect this to be accorded to him? It is said, he is unknown as a poet, and he must authenticate his claim, by

producing other poems of his up to the standard of this one. His friends are willing the question should be tried by this test, although, as must be obvious to any one at all familiar with poetical literature, it is a severe and not altogether a fair one. How many poets have gained reputation, and seeming immortality, from one or two pieces; Gray, and Wolfe, and Heber, and Muhlenberg, and Dr. Good, and Key, and Woodworth, are familiar instances in the number. Richard Henry Wilde, of Georgia, has been ranked among the poets of America, and the entire south have glorified over him for near forty years, by reason of his one little poem, of three stanzas, "My life is like the Summer Rose." How many copies of Motherwell's poems have been sold for the sake of Jeanie Morrison. Is not John Sterling loved as a poet by all who have ever read his few pages of Hymns of a Hermit. Cases like these will occur to every reader. In spirit as in matter the law is, that jewels shall ever be small and rare. Indeed the same rule applies not only to the minor, but to most of the greater poets. When Wordsworth was ridiculed from one end of England to the other, and in parliament, his friends found their weapons of defense, in a few

of his smaller pieces, like the Ode on Immortality, and the River Wye. How shorn would Tennyson laurels be without Locksley Hall and Ulysses; and is not old Homer himself almost exclusively thumbéd at the one page where we can weep over the woes of Andromache. All the truly divine inspired immortal lines that have yet been written, could be recorded in a much smaller volume than the multitude dream of.

The following further illustration of this truth, apt and close at hand, will certainly be pardoned. The able critic of *The Nation*, in a recent friendly notice of Mrs. Akers's volume says :

Better than by her pseudonym "Florence Percy," or than by her own name, readers of late minor poetry will recognize in Mrs. Akers a favorite verse writer when we say that she is the author of the touching lines, "Rock me to sleep." They deserve to be liked. It is no wonder that they have been sung everywhere, for they give sweet and unaffected expression to the sentiment of the purest tie between human hearts; they present it as it exists, kinder and dearer than even the reality, in the tender light of memory, and with all its sweetness increased by contrast with the harsh experiences of the world. We see no reason why the popularity of such verses should not be very long continued.

But if Mr. Ball be tried even by this hard test, who will say that his claim has not already been

vindicated. Let any critic show wherein, as a whole, the nine verses above for the first time published, and to which there are no other claimants, are inferior to the six other verses. But not to let the case rest here, as it might, the following pieces are published. They were selected by the writer of this article, after a not very careful inspection of Mr. Ball's manuscripts. They were written without any view to publication, and are published just as written, but are they not based on the same pure metal that runs through "Rock me to sleep," and have they not its ring?

MARRIAGE ANNIVERSARY — 1865.

My mind will wander back years three and twenty
In this soft gloom of an autumnal day;
As memory gathering up her robes of plenty,
And mingling with my dreams, bears me away.

And like the dew fall, that so still is stealing,
Each thought will enter, till the picture's whole,
And in my heart a sweet unwonted feeling
Creeps up, and bathes each sense of my glad soul.

Into these silken folds of life intruding,
The past, and present, all are tinged with gold ;
The warm lights of remembrance still are brooding,
And from the future the black clouds are rolled.

And these sweet wand'ring thoughts like happy dreaming,
Show brightest wings whene'er I think of thee,
All thro' the secret chambers haply streaming,
They seek, but find no words to set them free.

This mystic charm, alone for me has keeping,
So near my heart is flitting night and day,
That in the fullness of its tranced creeping,
My soul is lightened while from you I stay.

But as life's sunbeams slant and shadows lengthen,
There are no shut wings of our youthful joy ;
Life's flowers in their aroma seem to strengthen,
And in thy love is drowned all pain's alloy.

And as matures life's richest robes of glory,
I look upon your brow, now streaked with grey,
To read again life's ever pleasant story,
As noiselessly each pleasing sense has play.

And as I wander thro' the groves of feeling,
From the faint lover to the grand-sire now,
Each record sweetly lends its gentle healing;
No scentless flowers have ever decked thy brow.

These noiseless whispers, like a dream of beauty,
Have stilled the pulses when my heart would swell,
And cheered me on thro' life's unpleasant duty,
And taught the mind to echo — all is well.

Fond wife, this night, the same as our bright wedding,
Has that blest, tender, happy, heavenly hush,
That stole in on my soul with its bright shedding,
When our young hearts gave way to love's first flush.

The secret chambers of my life are freighted,
With the responses to my love you made;
These three and twenty years I now have waited,
Nor find in you one reservation laid.

WATCH OVER ME MOTHER.

While watching the shadowy forms of the night,
The glass of remembrance reveals to my sight,
The loved ones of childhood that sank to their rest,
And now are enjoying the homes of the blest,
Each thought of them ever is fragrant with love,
A glorious host, in the heavens above,
As round me they circle, this prayer I begin,
Watch over me mother, and save me from sin.

When cares and temptations beset me each day,
The angelic crowd comes in lovely array ;
As these shadowy forms appear to my view,
The load of life lightens, I strive then anew,
Temptations forsake me, the sweet breath of prayer
In low distant murmur, is borne on the air,
My soul, in its transport, this prayer will begin,
Watch over me mother, and save me from sin.

The doubting and fearing that torture the soul,
 Are quenched by the tides of the blest as they roll,
 And these gentle spirits, all pointing above,
 Melodiously whisper, "Here God is our love."
 And thought stealing upward is cheered while they smile,
 Till all my soul's sorrow is healed for the while,
 And from the heart's fountain, this prayer I begin,
 Watch over me mother, and save me from sin.

Benignly they beckon me onward thro' life,
 And lull all the fever, and anguish of strife,
 My sad heart responding is cheered on again,
 To battle temptation, and bear the world's pain,
 These sanctified visions of loved ones will swell,
 My bosom with rapture no mortal can tell —
 The soul in its trusting, will try thus to win,
 The watch of my mother to save me from sin.*

* Mr. Ball had not seen Emerson's lines:

"Close, above our heads,
 "The potent plain of Daemon spreads,
 "Stands to each human soul his own,
 "For watch, and ward, and furtherance;
 "Sometimes the airy synod bends,
 "And the mighty choir descends,
 "And the brains of men thence forth,
 "In crowded and in still resorts,
 "Teem with unwonted thoughts."

LIFE IS BRIGHTER.

Life is brighter, has grown brighter
Every year,
And the heart is ever lighter
Every year ;
And the pulses seem to strengthen,
While the pleasures ling'ring lengthen,
Every year.

Sweet the echo, as we listen,
Every year ;
While we read, the pages glisten
Every year.
Sound and sight make each sense tingle
As the pleasures thickening mingle
Every year ;

And the new joys life is breeding
Every year,

Come without our ever heeding,

Every year.

Life is now so full of glory

That I read its pleasant story

Every year,

Wondering when the frosts will gather

Every year,

Till the heart would seem to rather,

Every year,

Doubt, if Time had not forgotten

I had ever been begotten

Any year.

Charmed with life, and life's pure fountain

Every year,

That I dread less, grief's cold mountain,

Every year.

While the west is all a glowing

From love's fountain there is flowing

Every year,

Such a stream of pure devotion

Every year,

That my heart bathes in this lotion. —

Every year,

Opens wide its secret locking

To these fond ones who are knocking

Every year,

That my soul, in one great wonder,

Hopes the tie may never sunder

Any year.

These kind friends will ever lighten

All my cares, the future brighten

Till the western sun is glowing,

And the roseate hue is flowing,

In such gorgeous mellow shading

That I know not — Life is fading

Every year.

THE LOCK OF HAIR.

Laid away carefully,
From all other eyes,
Is a lock of brown hair
I lovingly prize.

Tis all that is left me,
I value it much,
It brings back the thrill
Of a passionate touch.

Long, long, in its silence
From other eyes hid,
Tied with a blue ribbon
It rests on the lid

Of the box of sweet sandal
She brought home to me,
From over the ocean
And there it shall be.

No eye must profane it;
But this lock of hair,
Mutely responding,
Has pointed me where

Her soul has ascended
To sing with the just,
All gathered, but this,
Of the mortal to dust.

The lock I had severed
From her cold clammy brow,
Is all that is left me,
Of her to love now.

I loved her while living,
Now named with the dead,
I go treading gently
Her blossoming bed.

The jonquil and jasmine
Grow green on her grave,
The heart hush is heavy
Tho' broken, 'tis brave.

And silently sweeping
The arc of the air,
Serenity settles
On all that is there.

GOOD NIGHT.

Sleep gently, darling one, so dear;
At your request, I sit me here,
Still ringing in my listening ear
Your sweet—good night.

Sleep on ; the gentle spirits wait
To open up the heavenly gate,
And welcome you to meet the fate
That bids—good night

To all of fear, and all of woe,
To all of pomp, and all of show—
Where tears are dried ere they can flow
To dim the sight.

Sleep on! I'll watch beside your bed,
And pillow soft your aching head,
Removing from my heart, the dread
 Of that good night,

Whispered so softly that it seemed
As if my brain had only dreamed
And on my vision there had gleamed
 The words—good night.

Now wake again, beloved one;
The night has passed, the morning sun
Has put his sparkling jewels on,
 And all is bright—

But cold upon that pillow lies
The mortal of the angel's prize,
And I hear, whispering from the skies,
 Her soft—good night.

These poems certainly show Mr. Ball's ability to write the one in question, and that he did write it, has been demonstrated by four distinct lines of proof, each of which of itself establishes the fact; first, the letters, proving that he read the verses to his friends years before Mrs. Akers's date; second, the poem itself as a whole, illustrating by its internal evidence that it was all the work of one mind, and of course Mr. Ball's; third, the Christmas Carols, using the very language of the poem nearly four years before Mrs. Akers's claim; and fourth, the original draft, settling the question with fatal certainty.

This is the case, and it is seldom that in such a matter one so strong and conclusive can be made. It is a strange affair, and Mrs. Akers's friends, to whom she so feelingly alludes in her note, will ask for a solution of the mystery. On the one hand stands a woman of genius, the authoress of many sweet and polished verses, which would have given her a reputation without the aid of the disputed poem (though critics pronounce that the best in her book), and on the other side,

stands a gentleman of high, social and personal position, of fine native poetical gifts, but without aspiration for literary fame, and careless to a proverb both in writing his verses, and what becomes of them after written; both claiming what, of course, one only can own. But is the good name of the parties necessarily on trial, as Mrs. Akers seems to imply in her note? Ordinary readers, the prosaic and hard judging, would say yes, but is that necessarily so? Are not other laws to be applied here than in ordinary cases of disputed *meum* and *tuum*? Mr. Ball himself, with the most naïve benevolence and kindness of heart, asked the writer, whether, as suggested to him by a distinguished literary friend, there might not be some occult psychological process by which Mrs. Akers could have possessed herself, unconsciously, of these verses from his mind or manuscript? In that unknown region, where lie great future sciences, of which clairvoyance, mesmerism and the like phenomena give empirical token, may there not be such methods? In the common manifestations of spiritualism, so called, there are things not less strange than this, and indeed quite like it. A mind which dwells so habitually in the ideal,

as Mrs. Akers, around which there is an atmosphere where grows so profusely her sweet, sad sick-room poetry, may surely, if any mind ever can, be expected to acquire by some such abnormal process. One of her most friendly critics, above referred to, says of her, "she obviously borrows thoughts and forms from other poets," and may she not, with the same innocence, by a farther reach of the same faculty or tendency, likewise borrow words, phrases and lines.

The experience of Christopher North, in the light of certain facts about Mr. Ball's manuscripts, offers another and kindred solution of the mystery. Mr. Ball is very careless of his manuscript poems. When he travels he often carries them in loose sheets of note paper in his pockets. They lie scattered on his table. Formerly he had a clerk, now deceased, who used to copy for himself many of the verses. Mrs. Akers sojourned for a while in New Hampshire, and Mr. Ball's business often carried him there, though they never met. In a way here hinted at, or in some other, "Rock me to sleep" or part of it perhaps was lost, got into some country newspaper, and floated before the eye, and into the memory, and poetical soul of Mrs. Akers, before she went to Italy, and there,

in Italy, by the alembic of her genius, all her nature excited and transfigured by the glorious monuments and associations around, the verses became transmuted, and, having to her lost their identity, were reproduced from her memory. The following apt and choice passage from the *Noctes Ambrosianæ*, shows how such things may happen with poets :

Registrar. You have a miraculous memory Sir. Is it true that you have by heart all *Spenser's Faëry Queen*?

North. As great a lie as ever was uttered. But thousands and tens of thousands of small poems lie buried alive in my mind: and when I am in a perfectly peaceful mood, there is a resurrection of the beautiful, like flocks of flowers issuing out of the ground, at touch of spring. I am in a perfectly peaceful mood now. And since you like to hear me recite poetry, my dear Registrar, I will murmur you a few stanzas, that must have committed themselves to my memory, for I feel assured that I did not write them, yet I have no recollection of them — mind that word — and perhaps they will take their flight now, like a troop of doves that on a sudden are seen wheeling in the sunshine, and then melt away from the eye to be seen nevermore.

The only difference between Christopher North and Mrs. Akers is, the one felt assured he did not write the forgotten, yet memorized verses, and the other that she did.

It is suggested, in good faith and with perfect kindness of feeling towards her, that the explanation of the matter lies in some such direction as above indicated.

“ High omens ask diviner guess
Not to be conned to tediousness.” *

But Mr. Ball is a man, a business man, with but one side open to the infinite, and that only occasionally; and withal a member of the New Jersey legislature, and must be judged by common rules. Therefore this presentation of his case has been made from a strictly mundane point of view, sustained by facts, dates and documents.

It is understood that there have been other claimants to the poem, Mrs. Akers says eight

* I made a comparison at table some time since, which has often been quoted, and received many compliments. It was that of the mind of a bigot to the pupil of the eye: the more light you pour on it, the more it contracts. The simile is a very obvious, and, I suppose I may now say, a happy one; for it has just been shown me that it occurs in a preface to certain Political Poems of Thomas Moore's published long before my remark was repeated. When a person of fair character for literary honesty uses an image, such as another has employed before him, the presumption is, that he has struck upon it independently, or unconsciously recalled it, supposing it his own.—*Autocrat of the Breakfast Table*.

or ten, but as they have not put their claims before the public in print, they are not farther noticed. Mr. Ball's case is here independently stated, and in its harness he awaits all comers.

H 5. 78.



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